FEEDBACK

INTRO

The point of a Feedback session is to improve collaboration and strengthen relationships within the team, elevating the team as a whole. First, a pep talk for you, the facilitator. For too long, and for too many people, feedback has been conflated with criticism, which, in some circles, ends up being synonymous with "an excuse to be excessively blunt without consequences." You're here, along with your team, to break that culture into tiny, much sweeter pieces that don't hurt so much going down.

Sometimes we need to hear uncomfortable things about ourselves in order to unlock the better selves within, but it's important to learn and maintain a distinction between 'good pain' and 'bad pain'. Like with sports, some soreness from exertion can be a sign of growth and progress, but pain from injury is just pain. Feedback might sting, but it shouldn't wound. You and your team deserve to grow and share without the bad kind of pain.

When you run a Feedback session, you should tell your team some of these things, in whatever way is comfortable for you to communicate them.

STEPS IN THIS SESSION

1 **Decide Feedback Rules**

15 min. Will you do this individually or as a whole? What template(s) will you use? **(62)**
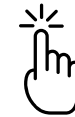
2 **Use Templates To Do Activities**

15 min. Choose based on your needs and opportunities right now. **(63)**

3 **Give Feedback**

15 min. Give feedback with each other! **(64)**

4 **Check Out and Praise**

15 min. Make sure you end on a high note. **(66)**

BUILD SAFETY

People are afraid of feedback for all kinds of reasons. They're afraid of being mocked, belittled, or patronised. Maybe they're also afraid of being praised for something they aren't responsible for, or that was an accident (thus raising expectations they aren't sure how to meet). In other words, even if the team has been told it won't hurt, there are many reasons people find feedback scary, so it's important not to dismiss those fears, and to see Feedback sessions as a way of building safety before you start building on it.

1. Decide The Rules

Time: 15 min.   **Material:** A4 papers, colourful pens

We all need a safe environment before we can give and receive criticism. In Feedback sessions, we can raise the level of critical feedback only as the trust grows. If the group is relatively experienced together, you can go around and share in the large group.If they're fairly new or still not totally comfortable with Feedback sessions, let them share among themselves until they feel safer.

What to do

▷ Make sure the room is comfortable and private enough that people outside the team won't overhear. Even if they won't hear anything "bad", it can feel awkward, and you want to make an atmosphere that's as comfortable as possible.

▷ Remind the team of the general session guidelines, and the team rules that are relevant for this session.

▷ Spend a few minutes deciding together whether you'll do individual feedback or stay in the larger group.

▷ If you have a large group, we suggest that you do feedback in small groups, and try to either divide them arbitrarily, or, if you've had a lot of frustrations, spread the 'cheerleader' personalities across the groups.

2. Use Templates to Do Activities

Time: 15 min.   **Material:** A4 papers, colourful pens

When you choose templates, make sure you choose the ones that are right for your team's size and development stage.

What to do

▷ With the team, choose the method or methods you want to use from the templates – or your own, if you have a way you prefer.

▷ In the early stages, or if there's been recent frustration and conflict, keep things focused on praise and positivity only.

▷ A more mature group can handle constructive criticism, but critical feedback is easier to take in when there's a relationship of trust. You can dial up critical feedback as the group matures, but always make sure there are more positives than negatives.

3. Give Feedback

⊕ **Time:** 15 min.   ✏ **Material:** A4 papers, colourful pens

It's important here, if you haven't already, to emphasise an important point with the team. The old adage that we can learn more from criticism than from praise is only partly true. One of the reasons we can connect more with criticism is that it tends to be more specific (vague criticism tends to – often rightly – get dismissed as just cranky). It's usually easier to take action on critical points, so we connect that with a feeling that it's worth more than hearing what we've done well, or should keep doing.

When we give praise, we're often less careful about what we're praising, so it's harder to be actionable, and has collectively left us with the impression that we should discount something that can be so uplifting and motivating. Yes, our growth needs critical feedback, but we can learn from praise. So go ahead and heap it on, just be specific about it.

What to do

▷ Let them take a few minutes to think – not everyone can come up with specific feedback on the spot – and write their feedback on stickynotes, one per stickynote.

▷ Ask them to share, in whatever way you'd decided is appropriate for the session.

▷ When giving critical feedback, remind the team to keep everything grounded in "I" statements, and to focus on specific actions and behaviours, depersonalising the critique as much as possible.

▷ If your team is still getting used to critical feedback, give them lots of examples of ways to frame and phrase what they want to say, and give them negative examples, too, to bring their own ideas into focus.

▷ Make sure you keep an ear out to help anyone who is struggling to give or receive something critical in a way that can really be taken in.

▷ Take the most positive stickynotes and hang onto them, so they can be brought out again later. It might even be fun to bring them out at the Conclusion and see if the team can remember who the subject was for each one.

4. Check out and Praise

End on a high note! As a team, reflect on the session. How did it feel, and what does it tell us? Is there anything we should do to be better prepared for Feedback sessions, or to make more out of them?

Then, go around and check out with a praise, individually or for the whole team.
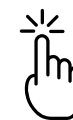
NON VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

While using nonviolent communication (NVC) techniques in a Feedback session can be really helpful, one of the critiques of NVC is that it can still be used by people whose hearts aren't in it, and turned into a sort of language game for delivering unsupportive feedback. This is a situation where you can step in. Start by trying to mirror what they're saying, and see if they confirm that. If you're still unsure or if their recipient seems really uncomfortable, change up the groups or move quickly onto a praise template. As we mentioned in the Handbook, there are situations beyond which you can't help, but first, it's useful to support everyone from an assumption of good faith. Again, be aware here of the power dynamics – both formal and informal – in the group or pair.